# What God Hath Joined —

*By RICHARD D. KATHRENS*

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# WHAT GOD HATH JOINED

*A Society Drama in Four Acts*
*Discussing the Divorce Question*

*BY*

RICHARD D. KATHRENS

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*Cast of Characters:*

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| SENATOR LYMAN J. MASTERS, WILLSON STAPLETON, | Law Partners |
| FREDERICK GORDON | President First National Bank |
| PARSON MURDOCK | Christian Minister |
| PAUL GORDON | Son, Frederick Gordon |
| RAY HEATH, HORACE GILMORE | Young Attorneys |
| HARVEY | Butler at Stapletons |
| BARCUS | Sen. Master's Office Man |
| LOUISE | Maid at Stapletons |
| MRS. STAPLETON | Wife of Willson Stapleton |
| MRS. PAUL GORDON | Formerly Minnie Stapleton |

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Scene of Play—Salem. Mass.

Time—Present Period.

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*Synopsis*

ACT I Library, Home of Willson Stapleton. (Evening in July.)

ACT II Office, Senator Masters. (Thirty days Later.)

ACT III Reception Room at Stapletons, late in afternoon. (Seven months Later.)

ACT IV Office Senator Masters. (Following day.)

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# WHAT GOD HATH JOINED

## ACT I.

*Library, Willson Stapleton's home. Early in the evening. Stapleton is seated at writing table in act of closing a letter. Rings for butler. (Enter Harvey, the butler.)*

Stapleton—(Reading letter; seals it and hands to butler). Harvey, do you think you can get this letter to the post office in time to catch the Limited for Boston?

Harvey—(Glancing at the clock). The Limited goes through here at eight o'clock, Sir, and the mail closes about a half hour earlier. It is now 7:15—I ought to make it in ten minutes, and have five minutes to spare.

Stapleton—Don't let anything delay you, for that is an important letter. (Harvey starts to go.) And, Harvey, you had better inquire at the office to make sure, and let me know. (Harvey starts a second time.) And, Harvey, (handing him a coin) buy a special delivery stamp and paste it on the letter before mailing.

Harvey—As you direct, Sir. (Exit Harvey.)

Stapleton—If Masters is at his hotel, he will get my letter before 9:30 to-night, and if no mischief has been done by that time, maybe we can get our breath for another day. (Walks about room.) Masters is a good fellow—a brilliant mind, thoroughly unselfish and absolutely on the square, but his radicalism is becoming a serious menace to our practice.

I sometimes believe he is right, and I envy him his frank and fearless advocacy of what he believes, but in this day and age no man can well afford to defy the conventions—to challenge the power of money, or to ignore the Church as a factor to reckon with. Future events may in time justify the course of the man who dares to do these things; but in his own day and generation the reformer is always made to pay a fearful price for his charged apostacy. (Enter Mrs. Stapleton.)

Mrs. Stapleton—Willson, haven't you reached a conclusion as yet concerning your future relations with Senator Masters? I tell you things are coming to a serious pass, and you are expected to do something.

Stapleton—I am thinking hard about it. I should like above all things to shape my affairs to your liking, but there are many other matters to be considered.

Mrs. S.—But, can there be any considerations that take precedence of your duty to your family—your religious convictions, and your social position?

Stapleton—Possibly not, but I must be fair with Masters. (Nervously walking about the room.)

Mrs. S.—Yes, Willson, but not at the expense of your self respect, and the social opportunity of your family. You must not forget that the marriage of our daughter into the Gordon family entails upon you, at this time, an additional obligation.

Stapleton—Well, what about the Gordons. We have given them our only daughter: what more do they expect of us?

Mrs. S.—Probably they do not expect anything more, but they are entitled to our good will, and our friendly concern for their interests.

Stapleton—Yes, I grant you—

Mrs. S.—You know the Gordons are not only the strongest family in Salem, financially, and the first in every social sense, but they are very active in Church work.

Stapleton—Yes, that is all true—

Mrs. S.—And, it is well known that Frederick Gordon is back of the Federation Bill, against which Senator Masters waged such bitter warfare, in the last Senate.

Stapleton—That's just where the shoe pinches. I rather agree with Masters' philosophy. I have always found him just about right on most questions. He has a faculty of seeing things in advance of other men, and of course, is not always understood—such men never are taken at their full worth. He may sometimes lack policy, but Masters is never a hypocrite.

Mrs. S.—But, Willson, we are rapidly approaching a family crisis, as a result of this man's intense radicalism, and you must now decide between Masters and Gordon. There is no middle ground. Paul Gordon is our son-in-law; his father is the financial factor back of the movement to abolish divorce in this state, and your law partner has craftily blocked this worthy legislation—has defeated it, in fact—and, that is not all—he has given his name—so long and so intimately linked with that of Stapleton—to the opposition measure, which not only seeks to sanction divorce, but recognizes the right of married people to separate for trivial differences, and to marry as often as they like.

Stapleton—Ha, ha, hardly that, my dear—

Mrs. S.—Yes, that, and more, Willson. He maintains that a woman should have a divorce, if she happens to want it—not necessary to make any charges against her husband, or to admit any of her own shortcomings.

Stapleton—Well, I am surprised, indeed, that any woman should find fault with Masters' position. As I understand it, he designs to place the whole question of divorce in the hands of the wife.

Mrs. S.—You may rest assured, Willson, there is some trick in this. He very likely hopes to place the responsibility for all family discord on the shoulders of the wife. You can't fool me. The solicitude for women, displayed by our legislators—especially in this age of approaching female suffrage—may be regarded with a degree of suspicion.

Stapleton—My dear, I am sure you do Masters an injustice. I have known him intimately during all my active years—associated with him nearly a quarter of a century—and in all that time, no man has ever questioned his absolute honesty. He holds some extremely radical views, to my way of thinking, and probably is a little too frank and candid in his dealings with the public, but I never knew another man so completely and earnestly devoted to the service of his fellow. Now, let's do him justice, whatever we may think about the question of divorce.

Mrs. S.—But, Willson, you are getting away from the issue. The question resolves itself to this. Are you going to break with your family, or with your law partner?—and, I want it distinctly understood that I am against your law partner—

Stapleton—Now, not so fast, my dear. I fear you are manufacturing an issue. I don't wish to break with either my family or my law partner.

Mrs. S.—That's it,exactly—decision, was never your distinguishing characteristic, Willson, and it is becoming noticeable to others. Why, only yesterday, at the Mothers' Union, Mrs. Burgess told me to my teeth, that you lacked the backbone to draw the reins on Masters—and, I am beginning to believe it is true.

Stapleton—Now, Mrs. Burgess is just talking. She does not know Masters or his real attitude on this question—I dare say, she knows nothing of the question. Besides, it is not a matter of "backbone." I have no right to even attempt to draw the reins on Masters—it's absurd.

Mrs. S.—But, is it not clear to your mind, Willson, that so long as you continue in partnership with Senator Masters you become a party to his doings—a sharer in his fortunes—and you will not be able to escape the penalty for his mistakes. The public will not make the fine distinction that you think.

Stapleton—Well, I must have more time in which to think about it—

Mrs. S.—And all the while I am to be subjected to suspicion, and the contumely of the self-respecting people of this town.

Stapleton—You are borrowing trouble unnecessarily. I am sure you are unduly exercised over this matter—far more than the merits of the controversy warrant.

Mrs. S.—Willson, why do you persist in making light of such a serious matter. All the church people are unalterably opposed to any move to give legal sanction to divorce, or social recognition to any divorcee. Senator Masters flies in the face of these people—mocks their most cherished beliefs—snaps his fingers at their Scriptures, and most irreverently speaks of marriage as purely a civil contract. (Enter Butler—Harvey.)

Harvey—Mr. and Mrs. Paul Gordon are in the reception hall. and, I have to say, your letter reached the post office in time for the Limited, Sir.

Stapleton—All right, Harvey—show the children in this way. (Enter Paul Gordon and wife).

Mrs. S.—Glad to see you, dear—and you, too, my boy, Paul.

Paul Gordon—Have you seen the extra Transcript? (Lights cigarette.)

Stapleton—Extra Transcript! Why, no. Knew nothing about it.

Paul—There's something doing when the Transcript goes yellow.

Stapleton—What's the occasion for the extra?

Paul—That's what brings us in. The boys down town are making as much noise, as if the President had been assassinated.

Mrs. S.—What in the world has happened.

Paul—Senator Masters has broken loose down at Boston, that's all.

Mrs. Gordon—It is just awful, Mama.

Paul—Has father telephoned you?

Stapleton—No.

Paul—I guess he changed his mind. He is terribly exercised over this latest outburst of Masters; and feels greatly mortified. He had me get a copy of the paper and bring it over, as he thought the boys would hardly get out this far.

Stapleton—I am indebted to him, and to you.

Mrs. S. —Willson, I've just felt nervous all day, and now I realize that I must have had some presentiment of this.

Stapleton—I was fearful myself of some impolitic utterance at this time and had posted a letter to Masters only an hour ago, urging extreme caution and discretion.

Paul—He's done the impolitic all right (puffing cigarette) and as for caution and discretion, he has forgotten their meaning. Father could hardly stand it—he went up stairs just about sick.

Mrs. G.—Paul, can't you stop smoking—just a minute.

Paul—Why, no one is objecting, but you—

Mrs. S.—Let him smoke, dear—men seem to get so much comfort out of this harmless habit.

Paul—Father thinks that Masters is either crooked or crazy (Stapleton looks over the paper at young Gordon, but makes no comment.)

Mrs. G.—O, mama, Senator Masters must be a bad man, to have such shocking notions, and Paul and Father Gordon think his interview perfectly disgraceful.

Mrs. S.—What did I tell you, Willson; well what does he have to say—

Stapleton—Pretty strong for the present temper of the people—

Paul—Read it out loud, if you think the folks can stand it.

Stapleton—Suppose you read it, (hands paper to young Gordon). Now, we may not agree with Masters, but let me ask you to read the story as effectively as you can—just as you would read it, if it were your own statement.

Mrs. G.—I sincerely trust my husband will never be guilty of such an unchristian statement.

Mrs. S.—That's right, my little dear. (graciously.)

Paul—Well, here goes—there's lots of it. (Reads from paper.)

**A DIVORCE FOR THE ASKING**

That's the head line.

Senator Masters of Salem
Defines His Position
on the Divorce
Question.

———

Leaves No Room for Doubt

———

He Would Give to the Wife
Final Power in All
Divorce Actions.

———

Mrs. S.—Almost my exact words, Willson. This is simply shocking in the extreme—

Paul—That is only a starter. (Continues to read from the paper.) The Hon. Lyman Masters, of the————Senatorial district—probably the most talked about man in Massachusetts—registered at the Parker House this morning. His coming to town had been unannounced, but he was recognized as he entered the lobby of the hotel and the news of his presence spread like wild fire. Almost immediately he became the center of an admiring and curious throng. In answer to a hundred questioners, who demanded to know his position on various phases of the divorce problem, he declared that he was in the capitol on a purely professional mission, and had not expected to discuss any of the campaign issues, but he added: "I cannot ignore the apparently popular demand for a statement from me as to my attitude on this great question, which the spontaneity of your call seems to reflect, and I promise you that before I return to Salem I will give to the press a clear and unequivocal statement of my position. You

may be assured that I will not hedge, and that I will speak my mind without regard to consequences, political or otherwise."

Stapleton—That's Masters, all right.

Mrs. S.—That means that he does not care what embarrassment he may bring to Willson Stapleton or his family.

Paul—(resuming reading) It was Senator Masters who led the fight in the last assembly against the Uniform Divorce bill which had the endorsement of the Federation of Church Societies, and the active support of the administration leaders. Notwithstanding the backing of these powerful forces, Masters was able by his eloquence and the persuasive power of his logic, to force the withdrawal of the Federation measure and the substitution of his own bill, which feat of legislative engineering is without parallel in the history of Massachusetts. (Paul remarks here.) That was the first time I ever heard father swear. The news of the defeat of the Federation measure did not reach Salem until nearly mid-night. We all sat up, expecting a victory for our side, and prepared to celebrate. When the news finally came, father was speechless for a minute; then he arose and slowly left the room, but we all distinctly heard him say: "Damn that fellow, Masters!"

Mrs. G.—I remember, that was before our marriage. Mother Gordon was greatly mortified, and Parson Murdock, who was there, excused Father Gordon's profanity on the ground that the provocation was very great, and that he, too, was of the opinion that Masters should at least be excluded from Paradise—

Mrs. S.—I think I quite agree with the Parson, and I approve, too, Mr. Gordon's terse and forceful way of putting it.

Paul—(resuming reading) The Federation bill was intended to practically abolish divorce in this state, by limiting the causes for which legal separation might be had. The Masters bill, on the other hand, designs to afford the unhappily mated the most expeditious release from their matrimonial bonds, and for comparatively trivial causes.

Mrs. S.—O, the heathen—

Paul—(continues to read) It is a complete reversal of the Federation bill.

Mrs. S.—A complete victory for Mammon—just think of it, Willson—your partner!

Paul—(continuing to read) The promised statement was delivered to a Transcript representative at six o'clock this evening, just as the Senator was boarding his train for Salem, and the full text here follows—

## THAT THE PEOPLE MAY KNOW.

"That there may be no good reason for misapprehension in the public mind concerning my position on the divorce question, I beg to submit for the thoughtful consideration of voters the following brief of my views: (Paul puts in here—Now, everybody take a long breath. (resumes reading.)

"I am opposed to the Scriptural theory with reference to the permanency of the marriage bond."

Mrs. G.—What does that mean, papa—the Scriptural theory—

Stapleton—Well, er—I—I am not just clear on that myself—I think it appears in Genesis—maybe—

Mrs. S.—Willson, it has been a long time, I am sure since you read the

Sermon on the Mount—It refers to marriages being made in Heaven, my dear —

Paul—Why, it's in Genesis, isn't it, where we are told about the creation and Adam and Eve and—the Ark and Jonah and—

Mrs. G.—Well, what in the world has that got to do with marriage?

Stapleton—(ringing the bell) I'll refer you to an authority on these questions (enter Harvey, the Butler). Harvey, can you tell us what is meant by the Scriptural theory of marriage?

Harvey—I think so, Sir. According to the Scripture, or more properly speaking, the Ecclesiastic interpretation of the Scripture, marriage is the union of one man and one woman for life—

Stapleton—Thank you, Harvey—

Harvey—But, human experience and court records demonstrate that marriage is not a life union, Sir.

Mrs. S.—That will do, Harvey. (Harvey withdraws). He talks like a student of Masters.

Stapleton—Continue, Paul.

Paul—(resuming reading) "There is no justification in law or morals for the life-duration of the marriage contract—

Mrs. S.—(breaking in) What presumption to offer his puny judgment against the authority of the Scriptures—

Paul—(continuing to read) "and, in my opinion, there is no good reason why such contracts should not be terminated by the mutual consent of the parties making them."

Stapleton—Of course, you understand, Masters regards the marriage covenant as purely a civil contract.

Paul—(continuing to read) "The right to engage one's self should carry with it the right to withdraw from the engagement; and the right to marry should imply the right to un-marry, or divorce."

Paul—That sounds all right to me—

Mrs. G—Why, Paul, Father and Mother Gordon both said that that was positively sinful—

Paul—(resuming) "Under existing conditions, in Christian countries, I regard divorce as a moral and social necessity."

Mrs. S.—The perfect audacity of the man—I never heard the like before.

Mrs. G.—I wonder why de doesn't move to China.

Stapleton—There's only one Masters—

Mrs. S.—Heaven be praised for that!

Paul—(resuming) "It is nothing short of a brutal outrage of common decency, that any law of God or man, should require two unmated, unloved people to live in wedlock."

Mrs. S.—I think it hardly proper, Willson, that our daughter should listen to this—it is sacreligious!

Mrs. G.—Why, Mama, it may be wrong to think and write that way, but it seemed to me as Father Gordon read that part, that I felt something in me responding to Senator Masters' view. I know it must be wicked of me, and so I have tried to close my mind to it.

Mrs. S.—That's right, my dear, you must never allow such poisonous and vicious theories to find lodgment in your mind. When you are in doubt, I advise that you go to Parson Murdock—Look to Heaven for consolation and guidance.

Paul—Just get this:—"The promise exacted in the marriage ceremony, to 'love until death do us part,' always struck me as a bit extravagant, if not ridiculous."

Mrs. S.—O, isn't that simply awful!

Paul—(resuming to read) "We have very little to do with our loves. Love is not a matter of the will, or a thing of the tongue; neither is it a commodity of the heart, to be bargained for or bartered away. I think the marriage form should be modified in this particular. Rational people should not be required to place themselves in the false position of agreeing to do something that lies entirely beyond their power and control.

Mrs. S.—He's an artful talker—and plausible to the ear—

Paul—(continues reading) "The loveless home is an abomination, and should not be tolerated one minute longer than is absolutely necessary. I have in mind the fearful consequences to society and the race, certain to result from the enforced marital relation of mismated and magnetically repellant natures, and I contend that the law should provide a means for the prompt dissolution of the marriage bond, in all such cases, without shame, scandal or a sacrifice of self respect."

Stapleton—It seems to me that Masters takes a very high ground, in that instance—

Mrs. G.—Surely, Mama, you would not want to live with a man you couldn't love?

Mrs. S.—Married people have only themselves to blame for such a condition. If discord comes into the home, it comes because God wills it—we cannot always understand the divine plan.

Paul—Listen to Masters. He draws the issue in pretty strong terms. (Reads.) "I cannot conceive how right minded people can take issue with me as to the wisdom, justice or morality of my position. (Mrs. Stapleton moves nervously, and displays her displeasure.) I can understand how there may be some honest difference as to the legal course in such actions, and the methods of determining the equities involved, and so I desire also that my views and convictions touching this phase of the problem be clearly understood."

Mrs. S.—I care not what Masters may think or say on this question. Divorce itself is an evil—a complete defiance of the Scriptural injunction, and such a thing cannot be thought of under any circumstances.

Paul—(Resumes to read) "In my opinion, the wife along should decide every divorce action to which she is a party"—

Mrs. S.—That's the first sane sentiment he has indulged. (Paul winks at Mr. Stapleton.)

Paul—(Continuing reading.) "The law should recognize the natural right of every woman to determine for herself the question of maternity in her case"—

Mrs. S.—Well, perhaps—

Paul—(Reading) "She should have the right to select the father of her own child—

Mrs. S.—(Putting her hands to her ears) O, no! No! That is scandalous!

Paul—(Continues) "which implies the right to divorce and re-marry. She should also have the equal right to refuse to subject herself to the possibility of becoming a mother, under conditions not pleasing to her, or under circumstances that would affect the physical or mental development of her child, or that would tend to diminish her love for it."

Stapleton—That is certainly advanced ground.

Paul—We are coming to the end of this. (Resuming to read) "It is my firm belief that the ends of justice and the best interests of society would be better served, if a divorce were granted to any woman who was willing to ask for it."

Mrs. S.—Now, Willson, did you ever hear anything more superlatively shameful? He would make a mere mockery of matrimony. And, I suppose a man would not be required to even go through the formality of asking?

Mrs. G.—No, no, Mama, you're mistaken. Isn't she, Paul?

Paul—I think Masters is entirely too one sided. Here's what he says: (Reads) "This does not mean that a husband should have a divorce, upon his request—

Mrs. S.—Oh!

Paul—(Resuming.) On the contrary, I hold that a husband is never entitled to a divorce, unless his wife is willing that he shall have it."

Mrs. S.—Well, I concede there is a grain of sense in that.

Paul—(Still reading.) "So long as men propose in marriage, women should dispose in divorce."

Paul—There's some class to that, eh! (Continues to read.) "And a sane and civilized marriage system would make divorce the prerogative solely of the wife." (Paul interjects.) Here's the climax. "On the question of the right of divorced people to re-marry, I have this to say: The law should in no way interfere with, or restrict the right or opportunity of any divorcee to re-marry; or to prescribe a time limit in which such persons shall not marry.

[Signed] "LYMAN J. MASTERS."

Mrs. S.—That last declaration amounts to a blasphemy, Willson. We might find some excuse for all the rest of Masters' radicalism, but when a man openly and publicly assails the most sacred institution of society, it is time that self-respecting, Christian people take a stand against him,

Mrs. G.—That's just what Father Gordon said—

Mrs. S.—I only wish I could prevail upon Willson to see his duty at this time. I won't be able to look my friends in the face after this—and, my husband's partner!

Stapleton—My duty! It is quite clear, but, my dear, I am not privileged to do my duty.

Mrs. S.—Why, Willson, I do not understand you.

Stapleton—Of course, you do not understand. Your idea of my duty, at this time, is to do the thing that will please Mrs. Burgess and her class—

Mrs. S.—Willson, Mrs. Burgess is a splendid, Christian woman.

Stapleton—I grant you all that. She means well, but she does not think deeply, and she and her kind, however splendid and Christian, are incapable of deciding questions that involve the slightest turning away from the puritanical notions of their grand parents. My desertion of Masters, in this crisis, will establish me in her high favor, I am sure. However, cowardly and un-Christian my act towrads my friend, it would be hailed by her, because of her prejudiced view, as an evidence of "backbone" in me; but, if I were perfectly free to do as my conscience directs, I should prefer to get along without her favor, and without the particular vertebra that seems to be lacking in my make-up.

Mrs. S.—But what are we to do? We cannot afford to affront and outrage these people. They are in the large majority. They mean more to us, and to our social position and opportunity, than a thousand Masters.

Paul—That's the candy —

Mrs. G.—Sh-h, Paul.

Stapleton—Exactly, "we can't afford." We are victims of custom and convention—puppets, danced upon a string—afraid to assert ownership to our own souls, and controlled by decadent philosophies and dead men's

opinions. My duty, is to stand by Masters in this crisis. His life is in this work, and he has no thought but the service of his fellow.

Mrs. S.—This is no time for heroics, Willson—

Paul—I'll bet on your mother. (Mrs. Gordon puts her hand over Paul's mouth.)

Mrs. S.—It is not your duty to stand by your law partner, when such action on your part is certain to bring disaster upon you, and seriously embarrass the social standing and opportunity of your family. Your family must come first, and I think even Masters would say as much.

Stapleton—Ah, there's the rub. Masters is magnanimous, and he would understand.

Mrs. S.—Well, why delay or hesitate, then, when, your duty is here, even if we are wrong? You have no right to sacrifice us on Masters' altar.

Paul—Sounds like Bryan, doesn't it?

Stapleton—I see there is no chance of changing your view, or bringing you to see the rank injustice which you force me, in the name of duty, to work against my friend; and, I have concluded to be guided in this instance by what you conceive to be my duty.

Paul—Hurrah! The lady wins!

Stapleton—I shall announce my withdrawal, in the morning, from the firm of Masters and Stapleton, but—

Paul (On the side.) That's the dope—there's no money in the other game.

Stapleton—but, I want it understood that I take this step reluctantly, out of deference to the wish of my family, who have religious convictions and social aspirations apart from my own.

Mrs. S.—(Embraces her husband and exclaims) The Lord will bless you for it.

[Curtain.]

## ACT II.

*Law office of Senator Masters. Evening in August. Ray Heath, a young lawyer, is seated at reading table deeply engrossed in a volume of the law. (Enter Barcus.)*

Barcus—Good evening, Mr. Heath.

Heath—Howdy, Barcus.

Barcus—Little unusual for you to be down town at night. isn't it?

Heath—Yes, but Gilmore and I have a damage case in Division Four that will be called first thing in the morning, and I'm just stuffing a little. Got on to an Illinois decision, late this afternoon, that takes acre of our contention. Have just finished it (looking at his watch) and guess I'll go home. What's going on here to-night?

Barcus—I don't know precisely. The Senator has an appointment here at eight o'clock, and he asked me to come down.

Heath—Political?

Barcus—Well, that's my guess. Everything else seems to have given way to politics of late. Someone is coming now. (Enter Horace Gilmore.) O, it's Gilmore.

Gilmore—Hello, friend Barcus. Did you find it, Heath? What did I tell you? Every issue in our case is covered by that opinion, and it is clear cut and decisive, too. Nothing to do now, but collect our fee, eh, old man?

Heath—Come on, Gilmore, we are likely to get in the way here. Some of the boys with axes to grind are coming in to compare symptoms with the Senator.

Gilmore—Well, I want to tell you, whoever they are, they will know more when they leave here, you can wager on that, eh, Barcus?

Barcus—The Senator is usually well able to manage his own affairs.

Gilmore—I should remark. I happened to be in here the day Stapleton withdrew from the firm. That was a difficult situation, and Masters handled it in such a way as to awaken my admiration. It was plain to him that Stapleton was the victim of unfortunate circumstances, and was coerced into doing the very thing his conscience and nature disapproved.

Heath—Well, don't you know, I thought something of that sort was at the bottom of that split.

Gilmore—Why, Stapleton could hardly speak above a whisper. The agreement to dissolve the partnership had evidently been reached, before I came in, and the old partners were taking leave of each other. Stapleton said: "I am depending solely upon the goodness of your heart to acquit me of any connivance or design of any sort to do you the least violence. Circumstances entirely beyond my control force me to sacrifice my own personal desires in order that I may satisfy other obligations, that no man can rightfully ignore. I know you, of all men, will understand me, and will not hold me recreant," and Masters, extending his hand, answered: "I have no family, Stapleton; I am free to think and act as I will, and to take the responsibility upon my own head. I cannot expect you to stand with me as against those you love, and who have a right to make demands upon

you. It is hard to give you up at this time, but it is part of the penalty I must pay." Stapleton was in tears, and by gosh, I felt like blubbering myself. Then Masters said this: "There's my hand, Stapleton, and I want you to know that I admire you, because you are willing in this crisis to do your duty to those who have first claim on you."

Heath—I'll bet old Frederick Gordon is at the bottom of all this. Ever since the marriage of Minnie Stapleton with Paul Gordon, the Stapletons have become Gordonized. It was an outrage, in the first place to sacrifice that girl's life for the miserable social return that the Gordon money might insure, but it's common talk that Mrs. Stapleton has been society mad for several years.

Gilmore—Why, I thought that was a love match.

Heath—A love match—a plain case of being led to the slaughter—what say you, Barcus?

Barcus—Well, I'd rather not express myself, but I always thought that Minnie was in love with Harold Brandon.

Heath—Of course she was, and I know Brandon was, and is now, in love with her. I know more than I'm willing to tell, but Brandon lacked the bank account, and so the Stapletons swapped the girl for a fellow who has the bank roll all right, but he seems to lack everything else.

Gilmore—But, has he got the money? That is, will he spend it? Old Frederick Gordon, you know, while many times a millionaire, has the reputation of being the closest man in Salem. He's a typical tight-wad.

Heath—Yes, I know, but Paul has a fortune in his own right, that he got from an uncle, and he's a high liver. He goes all the paces.

Barcus—That's news to me. I was under the impression that Old Gordon was a liberal man.

Gilmore—Not on your life. He's the chilliest mark this side the north pole—entirely without a sentiment above dollar getting. Why, that skin-flint can see a dime as far as you can see the sun—and what's more he can tell you the date on it. (All laugh.)

Barcus—That may be doing the old gentleman an injustice, but come to think about it, I've never heard a good word for him in the thirty years that I've lived in Salem.

Gilmore—Then I am going to break the record and give the old hypocrite his due. About three weeks ago I was walking through the square, and I passed Gordon. He had both hands thrust into his trouser's pockets, his gaze fixed on a spot just ahead of his toes, and apparently very much pre-occupied in mind. The thing to his credit, which I observed on that occasion, and which I wish you to note, is that Gordon had his hands in his own pockets. But, getting back to Masters—what do you think of his chances of going back to Boston this fall?

Heath—Why, they can't beat him. What do you say, Barcus? What's your honest opinion?

Barcus—I think he will win. Of course you know I am partial to the Senator, and hear only from those who are friendly to him. Your judgment is probably much safer than mine, under the circumstances.

Gilmore—I think it all depends on the sort of campaign the senator makes.

Heath—Well, he can always be depended upon to make a strong campaign.

Gilmore—I mean the territorial extent of his campaign. If he will cover the district, and in that way give the people a chance to see and hear him, it'll be all off with the other fellow. I'll wager my neck on his election.

Barcus—Then you are depending upon the force of his personal magnetism?

Gilmore—Yes, and yet not exactly that. Masters has an inimitable way of stating the truth, and his logic is of a convincing, decisive sort that fairly cuts its way to the center, removes all doubt and establishes confidence. (Enter Masters.) Talk of the—Good evening to you, Senator. We were just talking about you.

Masters—Well, go right ahead, don't mind me. I was told that the Mother's union took a snap judgment on me this afternoon, and have branded me an enemy of society. After that I am sure I will be able to complacently accept anything that my friends are willing to say.

Heath—Well, the mothers don't vote, and I don't suppose you are going to worry much about what they may have to say.

Masters—You are wrong, Ray. These particular mothers, who constitute the Mother's union, may not be truly representative of the mothers of this community, but I am contending for a principle, and the success of my cause will mean more to mothers than to any other of the members of society. The mother is the most important factor in the evolutionary process; she performs the highest function, renders the greatest service, and she should at all times be absolutely free in the exercise of all her natural rights. It is for the mothers primarily that I have taken upon my back the load that this campaign imposes. It hurts, like a knife thrust delivered by a friend, to be misunderstood and maligned by the very objects of our devotion.

Gilmore—There ought to be some way of letting these old girls know just where you stand. I am inclined to the belief that the little talk you have just delivered, if dropped in a Mother's union meeting, would very much confuse those who marked you up "an enemy of society."

Heath—I suppose the senator is depending upon his friends to take care of matters of that sort. (Masters nods and smiles.) But, let's be off, Gilmore. It's nearly eight o'clock, and we started nearly half hour ago.

Gilmore—It's a matter of deep sorrow to me, Senator, that I am not going to be here to work and vote for you this fall. Indeed, it is one of the great regrets of my life.

Masters—I appreciate your spirit, my boy, and your well wishes count for much. So, you are going to Texas?

Gilmore—Yes, I expect to leave next Sunday night.

Heath—Whew! Texas, in August. Almost prostrates one to think about it.

Gilmore—O' it's not so bad as you imagine. Several millions of healthy patriots manage to get along down there.

Heath—There is one good thing, however, about living in Texas. After one has become acclimatized, I've been told, his skin takes on an asbestos quality, that——

Gilmore—Yes, yes, I know what you are going to say, but we get more comfort out of another contemplation. However unfortunate may be our lot, we always find some measure of selfish satisfaction in the knowledge that others are even still worse off. So, when we are in the midst of a real Texas sizzler, we find consolation in the thought that some of our Massachusetts friends may have "to go to hell, yet."

Masters—If half we hear about the weather conditions in the Lone Star State is true, I am sure that the Texan may contemplate the here-

after with perfect serenity and equinimity, feeling assured that wherever he may finally stop, he will find a cooler climate.

Heath—Ah, that's good. (Enter Barcus.)

Barcus—(Addressing Senator Masters.) Mr. Frederick Gordon and Parson Murdock are in the reception office.

Heath—That's certainly a pretty pair. A most unusual combination—the minister and the money-changer.

Masters—The priest and the pirate——

Gilmore—It looks like a collusion between Heaven and Hell. (Heath and Gilmore start to go.)

Masters—(Pointing to library door.) Better go this way, Ray. Horace, this way, please. (Then turning to Barcus.) Ask the gentlemen to come in. (Enter Gordon and Murdock.) Gentlemen! You are very prompt, Mr. Gordon.

Gordon—I have made it a part of my life policy to be punctual The Reverend Mr. Murdock, Senator. (Introducing them.)

Masters—Mr. Murdock and I have known each other for several years. (To Barcus.) We shall be engaged here for some time, Mr. Barcus, and I will ask you to save us any interruptions.

Barcus—Yes, Sir.

Masters—And now, Mr. Gordon and Mr. Murdock, I am at your service.

Gordon—Preliminary to the purpose of our call, I wish to say that the Ministers Alliance held a meeting this afternoon and drafted resolutions condemning your announced divorce doctrine, and expressive of their attitude in the pending campaign. Of course, you will appreciate that the action of that body could not be otherwise than hostile to your philosophy.

Masters—Yes; I had thought as much.

Gordon—But, there are degrees of antagonism, you know. The opposition of the ministers may be strong and relentless, or it may be apathetic and indifferent, (Masters smiles) and I suggested that one of their number be delegated to confer with you, and that action by their body be held in abeyance until their representative could report; and so the Rev. Mr. Murdock is here to speak for the allied ministers of this city.

Masters—And, at your request——

Gordon—I thought—— it—— only fair that you be given opportunity to make such explanation as you might wish—— er——

Masters—I am certainly indebted to you for your disposition to be fair. I think I understand you, and now permit me to ask, what constituency is represented by Mr. Gordon.

Gordon—Well, Sir—— I—— I—— think I may speak—— for the people—— the people, sir. That is, at least a very large part of the best people of this community. I——I——

Masters—But, you mistake me. I understand that Mr. Murdock has been regularly appointed, and is authorized to speak for, and in behalf of certain others, while Mr. Gordon acts in a sort of advisory capacity to the Ministers' Alliance, and assumes to speak also for "a large part of the best people." Well, in any event, I shall be glad to hear you both, and I will thank you to be perfectly frank with me and, if there is no objection, I should like to hear from Mr. Murdock first.

Gordon—Perfectly agreeable to me, sir.

Murdock—Senator, permit me to say at the outset, that your statement given the Press at Boston some weeks ago, relative to your views

on marriage and the question of divorce, was so in conflict with the views of the church—based on the teachings of the Scriptures—that we, the ministers, felt it our duty to make protest.

Masters—I could offer no valid objection to your doing that which you conceive to be your duty. That is exactly what I am trying to do.

Murdock—But your attitude on this question is so inimical to the interests of the church that we fear we will be forced—much as we dislike—to take formal action against you, and to warn our people against the dangers to flow from such un-Christian doctrine.

Gordon—Permit me to interpose—— that is, of course—— you know—— unless—— you can be persuaded to modify some of your—— I may say—— extreme views.

Masters—I have asked you to be frank with me, gentlemen, and I purpose to be perfectly candid with you and, I will say that when I gave my statement to the Press I was not much concerned about the interests of the church. I was, and am, desirous solely of rendering a service to the people, to society and the race, without regard to the interests of any individual, creed or party.

Murdock—But, there is a moral and a spirtual side to this question, Senator, and the church, because of its divine mission among men, is the proper guardian and conservator of those agencies that make for the betterment and the spiritual uplifting of the people.

Masters—I am not seeking, nor am I desirous to usurp any right or function of the church. I am urging these reforms because I believe they are necessary at this time, and I shall welcome the support of the church.

Murdock—Impossible! Senator. There is no Scriptural warrant for your contention, and, of course, the church cannot endorse you——

Gordon—Exactly. Your philosophy, Senator, is thoroughly un-Christian, we believe, and the church people—if they consult their consciences —will have to vote against you.

Masters—But, gentlemen, you are drawing me into a controversy I would rather avoid. If my views happen not to accord with the Scriptures or the arbitrary position taken by the church, relative to the institution of matrimony, it is not because I am seeking to discredit the church or the Scriptures. The martial unrest, we witness on every hand in Christian countries, proclaims the insufficiency of the Scriptures on this question. Many of our social laws need reforming along practical, sane lines without regard to the past dictum of any school or system, —religious or otherwise.

Murdock—The church cannot countenance any turning away from the Word, sir, as interpreted by the recognized authorities.

Masters—Do you mean to tell me that you would not be permitted or justified to accept a truth unless it came to you through certain recognized authorities?

Murdock—If the acceptance of that truth involved a heresy, or brought into question the wisdom and sufficiency of the Scriptures, or implied a repudiation of their divine warrant——

Gordon—God knew that His Word would be questioned, so he left the interpretation to certain constituted authorities, whose judgment is supreme in all such matters.

Masters—I fear you do God an injustice, and make a travesty of the divine plan but, suppose the view of the church, based upon the present interpretation of the Scriptures should, after a while, change to fit some later conception of the Bible's meaning?

Murdock—We cannot speculate on what the councils of the church, in their wisdom, and with the guidance of Heaven, may conclude to do——

Masters—It is a matter of competence, and I might say that we—those outside the church, or only nominally within the church—are not convinced of the infallibility of these constituted authorities, and are unwilling to depend solely upon their judgment.

Murdock—But, I am bound by vows, sir, and I must regard the authority of my church as final, Senator Masters.

Gordon—And, I concur heartily in that sentiment, and I, too, bow reverently to the authority of the church.

Masters—Then you gentlemen are not free to think for yourselves and, under the circumstances, it were useless for us to discuss a question upon which your view is arbitrarily fixed for you by some one else.

Gordon—Do we not recognize certain authorities in the sciences to whose judgment we defer?

Masters—Most certainly, but only because their declarations have stood the test of human experience, and are justified by human reason; but we are not getting anywhere, gentlemen. I should like to know just what you expect of me. I want you to know that I cannot be driven from my position by threats or promises. You will find me amenable to reason, however, but you must show me wherein I am in error, and the reason you advance must itself be just and rational.

Gordon—O, we have no threats to indulge——

Murdock—We can promise only our support, and threaten our withdrawal of that.

Masters—I am not concerned so much about your support as I am about the soundness of the principle for which I stand. My personal success is a secondary consideration. If your conscience does not approve my course I shall expect your opposition.

Murdock—We desire, if possible, to prevail upon you to approach the great work you have undertaken in a more Christian spirit, Senator.

Masters—There is a great question in my mind if the Christ you profess to follow would approve of your hostility to my proposed reform of the marriage laws, and if I am capable of a fair appreciation of the character and philosophy of the man of Nazareth, I am sure he would condemn and renounce a large part of that which you conceive to be Christian.

Murdock—I am unable to reconcile your proposed reforms with any of the teachings of the Nazarene. At the very outset your plans contemplate a complete recasting of the ecclesiastic conception of marriage, and your attack upon the scriptural injunction is a blow directed against the very fundamentals of the Christ idea.

Masters—The Scriptural theory of marriage is not a Christ idea, and it is certain that it never specifically received His indorsement But, whether it did or not, I hold that human experience has demonstrated that this teaching of the Testament is destructive, and that ultimate social degeneracy must result from adherance to a doctrine that is neither scientific nor moral. My purpose is not to antagonize the church, but to serve the rights and demands of the people, having due regard for their mission in life, and the natural laws of their being.

Murdock—Man's highest mission in life is to prepare himself for the kingdom—to save his immortal soul——

Gordon—Amen, Amen! I say to that.

Masters—I observe that we are miles apart. I may more properly

put it, generations apart. Man is the result of evolutionary forces, and he must go along willingly or unwillingly, in accordance with the great immutable laws that encompass him about; and his well-being will depend upon his ability to recognize and adjust himself to the demands of these natural laws. And man's highest mission in life is not to prepare himself for another state of existence, but under natural conditions, to re-produce himself.

Gordon—You reduce the holy relation of marriage to a mere function of the animal nature——

Murdock—Yes, and you not only challenge the sanctity of marriage, but you question the right of the church to determine in these matters.

Masters—The sanctity of marriage is a misuse of terms, and usually conveys a wrong meaning. If there is anything sacred about marriage that quality is not conferred by the ceremonies of the church, nor does it flow from the claimed fact that marriages are made in heaven; but the reciprocal love of the contracting parties alone sanctifies the marriage and makes it moral and desirable. Love alone is holy.

I do challenge the right of the church to determine in these matters, and chiefly because the church is concerned with the control rather than the service of mankind; and because the church has always been slow to admit any of the discoveries of science that tended to disclose testamental ignorance.

Murdock—Would you have the church, which for two thousand years has preached the same gospel, abandon its consistency; confess that it was in error all these centuries, and reform its system to fit in with the new fangled notions of a socialistic age?

Gordon—Of course not! preposterous, Sir!

Masters—I care not what the church does or fails to do about anything, so long as its course is consistent with reason. I am concerned just now in reforming our marriage laws in the interest of the higher development of men and women physically, intellectually and morally, and I hold this to be of vastly greater importance than the perpetuation or passing of any creed, ordinance or institution.

Murdock—It is not the province of the church to deal with these more or less secular matters. The church strives only for reforms that will accomplish the spiritual salvation of these men and women, firmly believing that all else will be added.

Masters—The conditions under which men are born have much to do with their lives, their usefulness in the world, and I dare say, their soul's salvation. The position of the church has always been one of indifference in these matters. The church has always considered it of greater importance that children should be brought up Catholic, or Baptist, or Presbyterian, than that they should be conceived under normal conditions and be properly born.

Murdock—I see it is quite impossible for us to reach a common ground—our contention is useless. As a minister of the Christian church I cannot controvert the law that, "Whatsoever God hath joined, no man shall put asunder." I must accept this as the injunction of Heaven, which you seem to disregard entirely——

Gordon—Certainly, Senator, you would not go to that extreme.

Masters—I do not wish to go to any extreme, if you mean by that an abandonment of reason and common sense. I most thoroughly agree that no man has a right to sunder, or even to attempt to sunder that which God hath joined. I go farther, and hold that no man can sunder, or divide, or estrange in any way that which God hath actually joined.

The question quite properly arises: "Who of those who marry, are joined of God?" and how are these unions brought about? There is no evidence that God has joined those who desire to be separated—the facts would seem to prove the contrary.

Murdock—Well, Senator, it is useless for us to try to reconcile our differences, and I regret that I shall be obliged to report my utter failure to change you from your announced position, which we conceive to be in open hostility to the teachings of the church. The church cannot compromise on this question. It is unalterably opposed to divorce, and it must stand as adamant against any recognition of the right of divorced people to make a new or second marriage alliance. The very thought is sinful to the Christian mind.

Gordon—You—— you appreciate, Senator, what an unfavorable report will mean?

Masters—I suppose it will mean the opposition of the ministers——

Gordon—More, Sir. It will mean the alienation of the Christian people, and I ask you, Sir, can you afford to permit that.

Masters—I am not so much exercised over that fact as you seem to be, Mr. Gordon, and besides, I am powerless to make any terms with you short of a complete surrender of my position, and you gentlemen have failed to give me a single reason why I should abandon any of my opinions, or modify them in the slightest way.

Gordon—But, Senator, is it good policy to antagonize the church people of this community, and is it good politics, I might also ask?

Masters—I am not concerned about the policy or the politics of the situation. I shall do my duty as I see it without thought of the effect upon my personal fortunes.

Murdock—I sincerely trust that you will be awakened to the error of your course.

Gordon—It is positively ruinous, sir, ruinous!

Masters—I could hardly expect you gentlemen to accept all the conclusions I have reached touching the great question of marriage and divorce, but I do expect that those who essay to take issue with me before the people, shall first study the question. This is due, not alone in fairness to me, but in justice to the public, and the particular following they assume to guide. And I want to say for your benefit, Mr. Gordon, that this question need not be considered in its political aspect; and I dare say, Mr. Murdock, we need not concern ourselves much about its so-called religious aspects.

Gordon—Then, pray, how shall we consider this marriage question?

Masters—It is a problem of social economics, and its solution is to be found in the complete harmonizing of our laws with the great eternal laws. In other words, we must learn how to reform our laws, touching this all-important life relation, so they will not conflict with the natural laws; and the law of natural selection must not be hampered or interfered with by puritanical restrictions or conventional moral standards.

Murdock—Your philosophy is ruinous and completely subversive of the social order. Instead of emancipating woman you would make her the helpless creature of the whims of men. The stability of the marriage bond is the only guarantee which either state or church can give to woman.

Masters—Under my plan, the whims of men would not in any way menace the right or opportunity of any woman. She is now at the mercy of man, and all the standards by which she is measured are fixed by men. I propose that every woman shall be absolute mistress of herself, and

the man who marries her will know that he may not, on his own motion, release himself from her just claims upon him for support.

Gordon—You would give entirely too much power to the woman. Such a law as you advocate would produce a chaotic condition in society. Homes would be broken up for passing and trivial differences.

Masters—Why limit the power of the woman in matters, distinctively within her right? Is she more fickle, more shiftless than man—does she lack constancy, is she less honorable, can she not be depended upon to deal fairly? Why place her at a disadvantage? Your imputation, sir, is a libel on the honor and virtue of woman.

Murdock—That is where the ministrations of the Church come in; and when you take away from the home and marriage the religious influence, you sunder forever the only tie which binds—

Gordon—And if you do away with the legal restraints also, then marriage is reduced to a mere romance, and its purpose will never rise above a gratification of the flesh, and the fostering of sentimental bliss.

Masters—You are both controlled by the same false notion concerning the tie which binds in marriage. It is not a matter of mutual religious conviction, or of pledges and promises made in accordance with prescribed rules, but it is an inexplicable attraction—a magnetic or soul quality that is essential to the stability of marriage. It is now known, Mr. Murdock, that forms and ceremonies and rituals have little to do with the enduring marriage—that no power in Scripture or sky can avail to make tolerable or desirable a union where love is not; that men and women, involuntarily and unconsciously, but in obedience to the law of affinities, seek each other, just as the metals combine and harmonize their atoms—just as the pollen of the flower finds its kind. And, Mr. Gordon, the law can in no way affect the joyous interchange of hearts that love, nor bind together in peaceful union those hearts that have ceased to love. (Gordon and Murdock start to leave.)

Murdock—I am of the opinion that the radical reform of our marriage system, that your plan involves, would not cure the ills of society, as you think, but on the contrary would bring upon society new and unheard-of ills.

Masters—That is mere speculation, sir.

Gordon—To depart from the tried and tested Christian system would be a grievous mistake.

Masters—And that, sir, is mere assertion. And now I want a parting word with you gentlemen, who evidently have very much misjudged me and my purpose: You have failed utterly to grasp the purpose and spirit of my contention. You came here not to discuss, but to coerce—you are bound by preconceived notions that color and distort your mental vision; you do not attempt to combat my position with logic, but stubbornly proclaim the sufficiency of the Scriptures to meet the demands of the hour.

Gordon—To be sure—

Murdock—Exactly, sir, but—

Masters—The reforms in the marriage laws, to which I stand committed, are necessary—aye, essential—to the development of men and women of full stature. I will admit, for argument sake, that such liberal laws affecting the rights of women, as I demand, may result disastrously in some cases, but I maintain that it were better—a thousand times better—that ninety-nine divorces should be granted for insufficient cause than that one unwelcome, unloved child should be born!

Murdock—This is woman's rights with a vengeance.

Masters—Not at all. I plead for the child that is to be, and the world will yet come to my way of thinking on this question, because it is sane and civilized.

Gordon—We wash our hands—the consequences are upon your head.

Masters—I care not for the consequences to me, and I want you gentlemen to know that Lyman Masters will not hedge on a matter of principle, even to gain favor with the Pope. If you can't support me, I'll have to take my chances without your support. I can't retreat and keep peace with my conscience. It may mean political defeat, financial ruin, social ostracism—I care not if it mean persecution and crucifiction; it is my duty to my fellow, as I see my duty, and I will not fail! Good night.

Murdock—Good night.

Gordon—Good night, Senator.

(Exeunt Murdock and Gordon. Masters goes to reception room.)

Masters—Come, Barcus; let's go home.

(Curtain.)

## ACT III.

*Home of Willson Stapleton. Late in afternoon in March. Louise, the maid, is busy arranging the reception room. (Enter Mrs. Paul Gordon.)*

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Mrs. Gordon—Louise, is mamma here?

Louise—Yes, ma'm. (Turns to go, then aside. ) Minnie seems to be Club, and she is now in her private room.

Mrs. G.—Tell her, if you please, that I am here to see her on a most important matter.

Louise—Yes, ma'm; she just returned from a meeting of the Sunshine in trouble. She's not the same girl since she married that Gordon. I pity her, I do, for she's a dear, if ever there was one.

Mrs. G.—(Nervously moves about the room—first sits, then goes to the window, then to the mantle—sits again, but extremely restless all the while.) How can I break this awful news to mother. Maybe I should continue to fight, and bear my lot, without burdening her—but I cannot—I cannot! I have already put off too long. I must unbosom myself—I cannot carry the load, alone, another day. There is a limit to human endurance, and it certainly has been reached in my case. Mother has always been my confidant—why not now? I need her more today than ever in my life before. (Enter Mrs. Stapleton.)

Mrs. Stapleton—My dear Minnie! (extending her arms).

Mrs. G.—Mother! (Embraces her mother and clings to her.)

Mrs. S.—Why, what in the world has happened to my child—my baby girl! (Tries to release herself from daughter's embrace.)

Mrs. G.—Just let me cling to you, mother—just a moment—keep your arms about me, and love me.

Mrs. S.—There, there, my dear—you must be ill. You are all in a tremble. What has happened—won't you lie down—what's the matter?

Mrs. G.—No. I am not ill, mother—but a thousand times worse off.

Mrs. S.—Come, tell me all about it—I never saw you act this way before—you are not yourself.

Mrs. G.—I've not been myself for months.

Mrs. S.—For months?

Mrs. G.—I am so unhappy, mother, I could die! (Falls in mother's lap and weeps.)

Mrs. S.—O, Minnie! That is sacrilegious. What dreadful thing can have happened?

Mrs. G.—I have tried so hard—O, so hard—to do my duty—to please you and father and—Paul—and I never once have sought to please myself.

Mrs. S.—Indeed, you have always been an obedient and tractable child—but, Minnie, you should not find it difficult to do your duty as daughter or wife.

Mrs. G.—It depends much upon what is meant by duty. If it is duty to kill one's nature—to live a false life—to smile, when you are choking with grief—to affect to be happy, when your soul is in eclipse—to be forced to give yourself to a man whose very presence is hateful; whose manner is revolting, and whose touch is like that of some slimy, crawling thing—O, if that is duty, then I must rebel! (Falls on table, and sobs heavily.)

Mrs. S.—Oh! this is madness, child.

Mrs. G.—Maybe I am mad—if not, I fear I soon shall be (wringing her hands).

Mrs. S.—O, I wish Willson were here. I am completely unnerved by this shocking revelation. I am incapable of advising you in such a crisis (rings bell—enter Harvey). Harvey, I wish you would call Mr. Stapleton's office—find out what is detaining him, and ask him to hurry home. (Harvey bows, and goes out, and Mrs. Stapleton turns to her daughter.) Your father and I thought we noticed a change in you and Paul, but we ascribed it to a whim or tiff of the moment. (Re-enters Harvey.)

Harvey—Mr. Stapleton is here, ma'am, his machine is just entering the driveway. (Retires.)

Mrs. S.—Thank goodness! (Addressing herself again to Mrs. G.) He will be thunderstruck. We little dreamed of such a state of affairs!

Mrs. G.—I hardly know how to tell papa. He may not understand, as you can. I am innocent, mother, of any wrong, and yet I seem to feel so guilty—O, what shall I do!

Mrs. S.—Of course you are innocent (putting her arms about her). You must be brave—this is a severe trial, but—(enters Stapleton, and Mrs. S. exclaims) Willson!

Stapleton—(Observing at once that something is wrong.) Well, what does this mean. (Minnie rushes to her father and buries her face in his bosom.) Both in tears! Here (raising his daughter's chin) look up at me, my little darling. Tut, tut, tut—come, tell me what has happened. Has anything gone wrong at home—between you—and—Paul?

Mrs. G.—Yes—all wrong.

Stapleton—How long has this been going on?

Mrs. G.—Ever since our marriage.

Stapleton—What! I'm astounded!

Mrs. S.—Just to think of it, Willson—isn't it a shocking revelation?

Stapleton—Does Gordon abuse you?

Mrs. G.—In every way—except to strike me.

Stapleton—The wretch, he shall answer to me for every indignity offered my defenseless little girl—the coward—I—I—

Mrs. G.—No, no, papa—not that. It would only make matters worse.

Mrs. S.—Willson, it behooves us to be calm in such a crisis. O, I can hardly believe it of Paul.

Stapleton—Why haven't you let us know of this before?

Mrs. G.—I cannot explain—I just lacked the courage, I suppose. I wished to spare you the pain—and—the possible scandal of it all (weeps). I just could not endure my lot another hour, and—

Stapleton—And so you came home. That is right; only I am sorry you waited so long. This is your home, always; and God knows you are welcome here—even though you had sinned. Well, we'll try to make the most of it.

Mrs. S.—Maybe on reflection things will assume a different aspect. Paul Gordon is like all young fellows—he can't be so bad as you would have us believe. You are overwrought, my dear, and you will see your error, when you have had time to reconsider.

Mrs. G.—My error!

Mrs. S.—I mean, dear, that you are probably mistaken—permitting yourself to magnify and overcolor, you know.

Mrs. G.—My error was committed when I consented to marry Paul Gordon. It was a sense of duty that prompted me to make that mistake;

but I was not entirely to blame. I took your judgment against my own, believing in my innocence that your experience and your motherly concern would be my safe guide.

Mrs. S.—Well, dear, you did well . (Addressing her husband.) She might have done far worse, eh Willson? Paul Gordon was much sought after. Why, Minnie, you know the girls were all crazy about him. He is rich, and has given you many advantages—among them a most enviable position socially—

Mrs. G.—(Almost disgusted.) O, mother, don't speak to me of riches, or social position. These things mean nothing to me. My heart craves for affection—just one hour of love, I have never known. (Weeps.)

Stapleton—(Nodding his head thoughtfully.) I think I understand—Minnie is right.

Mrs. G.—I never loved Paul Gordon—I told you so. It was Harold Brandon for whom my young heart craved. You told me that my interest in Harold was a childish infatuation, and that I would learn to love Paul—that he was rich—just as you now say—and could satisfy all the desires of my heart. I was without experience—innocent,ignorant of myself—of men, and of the world—but I was dutiful. I foolishly believed that love was a thing to be acquired by an act of the will—that it might be grown from barren soil—that two beings, temperamentally opposed, might be brought together and harmonize their natures, by simply wishing to do so! It is not true, mother. I know now what Senator Masters meant when he said—and his words have burned their way into my memory—"Love is not a matter of the will, or a thing of the tongue; neither is it a commodity of the heart, to be bargained for or bartered away."

Stapleton—Too bad! too bad!—an awful mistake has been made. This is a serious problem.

Mrs. S.—But you have married Paul Gordon, and you must now make the most of it. There's no escape—unless you would be willing to bring the shame of divorce upon our name.

Mrs. G.—I have determined upon my course. I want you to know my intention and plans; and I want your approval and support—

Mrs. S.—Of course, Minnie, you shall have our approval and support in all things which are good—and—and which will not subject us to the criticism and contempt of our neighbors—

Stapleton—Now, I think it hardly necessary to consider the neighbors—she is our daughter, and must come first—

Mrs. G.—In any event, mother, it is my life and happiness against the possible whims and notions of your neighbors.

Mrs. S.—But, my dear, you must not be rash or impetuous. You must look before you leap!

Mrs. G.—I am neither rash nor impetuous. For four long months I have put up with every indignity that any white woman was ever called upon to endure. I have suffered in patience. For weeks and weeks I have put off doing the thing that now seems inevitable. Life is intolerable with this man, and I cannot think of passing another night under his roof.

Stapleton—Then you have left Gordon?

Mrs. G.—Forever!

Mrs. S.—But, dear, you are unduly exercised. She can't be entirely responsible, Willson. Patience, dear—you must learn to bear and forbear. Paul is young—and—thoughtless, perhaps; but he will mend his

ways. Now, there (stroking her hair), there—you must return to him, like a dutiful dear—

Stapleton—Not against her will.

Mrs. G.—No, never, mother! I do not intend ever to return to him—not for one minute. I will go into the street first. Can't you appreciate my aversion for him—and the possible consequences? Don't you understand what I mean?

Mrs. S.—O, the shame and the ignominy of it all!

Mrs. G.—Yes, but think of the ignominy and the shame of my position! Haven't I made myself clear to you? I came here for the sympathy that only a woman can give. I am appealing to your mother's heart—to your woman's nature. You, of all the world, should not mistake me! Would you have me go back to a husband against whom my very nature revolts—to be a wife to a lecherous thing—to submit myself to the beastly overtures of a man I loathe? Think of the shame and degradation of it! O, mother, why do you force me to speak out! Think of the possibility of maternity under such circumstances—the crime of mothering a child I could not love. (At this point Mrs. Stapleton begins to awaken to a sense of the real situation.) Would you subject me to that—would you deliver me again into such a bondage?

Mrs. S.—(Now realizes the real force of what has been said. ) O, I now understand—I do sympathize with you, from the bottom of my heart. Willson, I see clearly at last—it is a judgment from heaven! I thought I was a good woman—a good mother—but I am neither. I have sacrificed everything to the conventions. The baubles and the artificialities have lured me from the real things of life. In my eagerness for social preferment, indeed, I have sold our daughter into a bondage worse than slavery—and this is my punishment. I must now pay the penalty for my folly. But my eyes are open and my heart turns to my poor suffering girl—and I will ransom her, if it takes the last vestige of my dearly bought caste. Indeed, I sympathize with you! My heart bleeds for you!

Mrs. G.—Mother!

Stapleton—You need not rebuke yourself, my dear. You acted according to the light given you. Our daughter must be freed from this intolerable union, and it matters not, now, what the world may say or think about it. We, who have not hesitated to criticize and condemn others, must now face a condition in our own lives, and we need not hope to escape unscarred. But we shall come out of this ordeal with a higher conception of the right. Having suffered ourselves, we will develop a better consideration for others who suffer. The shoe is now on the other foot—our viewpoint has become radically changed, and we are now able to get an entirely new perspective of the question of divorce. It's the irony of fate, and yet fate has favored us beyond our deserts. Masters has been re-elected. His divorce bill is certain to pass the next Legislature; and under this new order a decree of divorce can be secured without publicity or scandal of any sort. Little did we dream that this great man, whom we have abused and misunderstood, was working out our salvation!

(Curtain.)

## ACT IV.

*Law Office, Senator Masters, same as Act II. The Senator is seated at his desk reading his mail. One day is supposed to have elapsed between Act III and Act IV. (Enter Barcus.)*

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Barcus—(Addressing the Senator.) Mr. Frederick Gordon wishes to see you, Senator, and privately, he says.

Masters—Gordon, eh? Anyone with him?

Barcus—No, sir.

Masters—Send him in, and don't admit anyone else until our interview is concluded. (Ex. Barcus.) Gordon! What brings him here? He certainly has an axe to grind. (Enter Frederick Gordon.)

Gordon—Good morning, Senator Masters.

Masters—Good morning, sir. What unusual happening is the occasion for this call?

Gordon—It is an unusual happening that brings me; and, indeed, a most singular caprice of fate that brings me to you.

Masters—So!

Gordon—I have come to see you on a matter of very great importance to me—very great—and possibly of almost equal interest to you. In any event, a subject very close to your heart, I judge, and one on which you are regarded as somewhat of an authority.

Masters—You flatter me. I can hardly conceive of the existence of any subject in which I am interested being considered of great importance to you. I am certainly concerned to know where we reach a common ground in our thinking.

Gordon—Masters, you are just fresh from a victory in this district that is distinctively a personal triumph. Every force in the community, it seemed, was arrayed against you—the church, the press, your partner and the politicians—but you won, notwithstanding all the handicaps.

Masters—However much my election may appear a personal victory, I do not regard it so. It is a vindication of my position on the divorce question, of course; but the victory came to me because of the good, hard, common sense of the rank and file, to whom I made my appeal. They have no axes to grind, no enemies to punish, or friends to reward, but just honestly bent on doing the right for the sake of right.

Gordon—As you know, I was actively engaged against you during the campaign—

Masters—So I was informed—

Gordon—That is, not against you personally; but I was opposed to some of your political, and I may say moral, theories—and, under the circumstances, I cannot expect that you will regard with favor any proposal I may make, although sincerely and honestly made.

Masters—I hold no malice against any man who opposed me honestly. The man who could not conscientiously support my position would be a coward to have done otherwise than vote against me. But, to come to the purpose of your call, Mr. Gordon.

Gordon—(Nervously)—Yes, yes, yes. For several months past we have come to regard the marriage of our son Paul with Minnie Stapleton as—unfortunate. Matters are becoming serious with them—in fact, a crisis has been reached, and we are threatened with—well, to say the

least, a very unenviable airing of family affairs. It seems that Paul and his wife cannot reconcile their differences. The girl's mind has become perverted of late. Nothing that he can do pleases her. He has given her everything her heart could crave, I am sure—an honored name, a luxurious home, expensive gowns, and every social advantage—but she simply will not be contented. Why, my boy Paul might have married an heiress.

Masters—Why do you come to me with this story?

Gordon—My son has concluded—and I quite approve his determination, humiliating as it may be—to apply for a divorce. There is no good reason why my boy should give up his independence—go through life bound to a woman who continually criticizes his actions and habits of life, and who contributes nothing to his happiness.

Masters—How about the girl—Mrs. Gordon—her happiness—her independence—the demands of her nature—the unsatisfied yearnings of her heart?—

Gordon—That's quite another matter, Senator, and one in which I am not so much concerned. My son's peace of mind, and my family name, come first. The girl interferes with Paul's freedom, and she is a stumbling block in the way of his social aspirations; and she must be gotten out of the way. (Masters nods knowingly.)

Masters—What can I do? How may I be of service to you in this affair?

Gordon—I can hardly expect you to take my son's case, but—eh—you can also decline to take the case against him.

Masters—I do not understand you, Mr. Gordon—this is the first I have heard of the matters of which you have just apprised me.

Gordon—So much the better. You are not committed in any way—and—and you are certainly under no obligations to the Stapletons. Mrs. Gordon has declared that she will not only contest Paul's action, but says she will file a cross-bill, and ask for the decree herself. This must not occur—this woman must be defeated in her mad purpose.

Masters—I can't as yet see wherein all this concerns or interests me.

Gordon—It's your extreme modesty, Senator. Your presence in this case—on either side—would attract the attention of the entire state to our family difficulties, and a contest at this time, and the decree against Paul, would forever link the name of Gordon with shame and disgrace. Mrs. Gordon will seek to retain you, and for the purpose of adding as much as possible to the humiliation she has already brought upon us.

Masters—What would you have me do—I am free from any entanglements?

Gordon—To business, then, Senator. You have a score to settle with the Stapletons, and I am sure you will not allow this opportunity to pass unimproved. (Chuckles.)

Masters—Again, I must say, I do not follow you—

Gordon—Willson Stapleton deserted you, when you most needed his support—his family forced him to do it—but he deserted, nevertheless. He quit you in mid-stream, and the current was running fast, too. You were not the popular idol then that you are today, but you were the center of attack from every quarter—(Enter Barcus; glances in confused manner at Gordon, and then says, haltingly):

Barcus—A—A—lady wishes to see you, sir. Says her business is very urgent.

Masters—She'll have to wait a little while—I'll let you know. (Barcus ex.)

Gordon—To resume. While Stapleton could not be induced to take the stump against you, he was not active in your support—and his silence, as you know, furnished powder for your enemies. Now, the day of reckoning is at hand. Fate favors you with an opportunity that seldom comes to any man—to humble the Stapletons to the dust—to strike back, and destroy those who would destroy you (chuckling). And I know a man of your power can be depended upon to make the most of the situation.

Masters—Your philosophy is good, Gordon. I am much influenced by what you say, and I have half a mind to follow your advice.

Gordon—Then it's a bargain. I want you to decline to take Mrs. Gordon's case, that's all—just be too busy with other matters—and leave the rest to me. Here's my check for a thousand dollars (placing check on the desk) and when the case is concluded you may call on me for five thousand more. That's all I want, Senator. (Starts to go.)

Masters—You very much overestimate my importance in this action, I fear. The court will have something to say. My bill is not yet the law, you know.

Gordon—I can handle the court. Every member on the circuit bench is under obligation to our bank, and can be controlled. You are the only man we fear—and you provided for, the rest is easy. My son must have this decree at any cost. (Continues to chuckle.)

Masters—(Changing his tone and manner.) At last, I think I understand you perfectly. Now, I will close this interview, and in a very few sentences—

Gordon—What do you mean, sir?

Masters—I said I would close the interview —

Gordon—But, Masters—

Masters—And I intend to do all the talking—not another sound out of you. Gordon, you are unworthy of the contempt of honest men. You are without exception the most unscrupulous old rascal that I have ever known—

Gordon—You wrong me cruelly, sir.

Masters—Wrong you—you canting old hypocrite—impossible! You are a deacon in the church, the leader of a Bible class, a supporter of missions; and you never lose an opportunity to advertise your church benefactions—to let the people know how much you do for God—and yet, for your own ignoble ends, you would not hesitate to abet your son's plans to do a dastardly injustice to a blameless woman.

You are a dangerous man, Gordon—a wolf in sheep's clothing. As for your son, who "might have married an heiress," I want to say that there never was a minute in his shiftless existence when he was worthy to loose the strings of Minnie Stapleton's shoes. This young man may have virtues that his father lacks, but he never earned a dollar in his worthless career, never had an ambition above joy-riding and cigarette smoking, and his only apparent claim to respectability is the clothes he wears.

I shall follow your advice, sir, and "destroy those who would destroy me," and to that end I shall volunteer my assistance to Mrs. Gordon; and I shall consider it a signal privilege to serve so estimable a lady in such a worthy cause.

There's not enough money (taking up Gordon's check) in the state

of Massachusetts to induce me to join issues with you against this woman, or any woman.

To hell with you and your kind. There's your retainer (tears up check and throws it in his face) and there's the door. (Ex. Gordon.)

(Masters pushes bell, and Barcus enters.)

Barcus—You called me, sir?

Masters—Yes. Have her come in—and Barcus, while I am engaged with this lady, I wish you would get Mrs. Paul Gordon on the telephone, and ask her to come here soon as she can do so conveniently.

Barcus—Why, it is Mrs. Paul Gordon who is waiting you now.

Masters—Good, good; have her come right in—couldn't be better! (Enter Mrs. Gordon.)

Mrs. Gordon—Senator Masters.

Masters—(Extending both hands). I am glad to see you, Minnie.

Mrs. G.—Are you really glad to see me?

Masters—Perfectly delighted! Have a seat.

Mrs. G.—And you hold no ill-will towards me?

Masters—Ill-will towards you—towards a Stapleton?

Mrs. G.—How unworthy we have been.

Masters—Why, Minnie, I have known you since you were five minutes old. I have watched your development, from wriggling, cooing infancy, to charming womanhood—and—I am old enough to tell you the truth about it—I've loved you all the while. Talk about ill-will—I'd give my arm any time to serve a Stapleton, and both of them to serve you.

Mrs. G.—You embarrass me with your magnanimity. It was mother and I who prevailed upon papa to withdraw from his partnership with you. He did not want to, but we insisted, until he consented.

Masters—He did right—under the circumstances.

Mrs. G.—Why Mr. Masters!

Masters—Your happiness seemed to demand that he make the sacrifice. He did what he conceived to be his duty to his family, and I have always admired him for his courage. His action proved that he loved me not less, but his family more, that's all.

Mrs. G.—Indeed, we did not know what we were doing.

Masters—Now, that's all past. Let's forget about it. I was just going to send for you.

Mrs. G.—What a strange coincidence—that I should come here, unbidden, and just at a time when you wanted to see me. I do not understand.

Masters—But you will when I tell you that I know all about it—and I just wanted to tell you that my services were subject to your command.

Mrs. G.—Who's been telling you?

Masters—I just concluded a very pleasant chat with your—er—venerable father-in-law, a few minutes ago. He was here while you waited in the reception room.

Mrs. G.—Then he told you all—

Masters—No—not all, but quite enough. He told me his side, and that's all I need to know. Your case is made. I am going to free you from this unfortunate union, and the world will not need to know about it.

Mrs. G.—I shall never cease to be grateful—(enter Barcus).

Barcus—Mr. and Mrs. Stapleton, Senator.

Masters—Just a minute, Barcus. (Addressing Mrs. Gordon.) Let

me see them alone for a minute. You step in that room, where I can call you.

Mrs. G.—I expected them here before this. It was yesterday that we all came to a realizing sense of our ungraciousness—how we had gratuitously wronged you—and papa and mamma determined that it was our duty to come to you in person, and to make such mends as we could—so—I—I —

Masters—Sh-h! hurry, hurry (pushes her gently through the door and turns to meet the Stapletons, who enter at the other side of the stage.) My dear old friends!

Mrs. Stapleton—I'm fairly overwhelmed, Willson; "friends." (Looks appealingly to her husband, who is also somewhat confused.)

Mr. Stapleton—We have been everything else, Lyman, and we are not deserving of such a welcome. (The old partners shake hands.) We came here contritely, to acknowledge our fault, and to assure you of our deep sorrow and regret. It's late, but nevertheless genuine and sincere. And Mrs. Stapleton has come with me, as a further evidence of our perfect good faith.

Masters—I could not ask or expect so much. You are both very dear to me; and I assure you this formality and ceremony you bring with you on this occasion is quite out of place. (Extends hand to Mrs. Stapleton.) I would rather receive you—and as I do—as old friends returned from a journey.

Mrs. S.—I am abashed and confused by the warmth of your greeting. Indeed, Mr. Masters, I am the guilty one. It was I who insisted that Willson should sever his business relations with you, and he consented only after weeks of nagging on my part; and then entirely out of consideration for me. An unexpected sorrow has come to us—our Minnie is in deep trouble—and this affliction has shocked me to my senses.

Stapleton—Lyman, you have completely overpowered us with the noble and generous spirit you have displayed. It was in your power to crush and humiliate us, but instead of rebuking us, you have made excuses for us—fairly justified our course—and magnanimously helped us out of a most perplexing difficulty.

Masters—Let's not discuss it further; and please remember, both of you, that your admissions and explanations are quite unnecessary. I have understood all along. You, madam, had a perfect right to disagree with me—and I have always esteemed Willson the more because he did not allow me to win him away from you.

Mrs. S.—Can't you say some bitter, cutting, disagreeable thing—so we won't feel at such a disadvantage?

Masters—(Slapping Stapleton on the shoulder—both laugh.) I regret very much to learn of your daughter's unfortunate trouble—

Mrs. S.—Then you know of it? It is already public gossip?

Masters—No, hardly that. (Goes to the door and beckons Mrs. Gordon.) I got the news (presenting Mrs. Gordon) from one of the parties most concerned.

Stapleton—So you beat us here. (Shaking his finger at her.)

Mrs. S.—She came ahead, Willson, to spare us the pain that a repetition of the story of her trials would occasion (taking her daughter in her arms), the dear that she is.

Mrs. G.—I have not told him, mother—only in the most general way—and—

Masters—It will not be necessary to tell me, or any other person!

When my bill becomes the law—and it will be the law within ninety days—the unhappily married will not be required—nay, not permitted—to publicly assail each other; to defile and defame the name of one who once was loved. When my bill becomes the law, no wronged and suffering woman will have need to make charges against her husband; or to detail, for the delectation of a curious and gossipy public, any of the indignities she may have endured; or to confess any of her own frailties or mistakes. The aggrieved wife will determine her own course—taking such counsel as she shall elect—and, if she is willing to ask for a divorce, the court will have no discretion but to issue the decree upon her request.

In your case, the world will need to know only this: Minnie Stapleton was unhappy in her married life, and she divorced her husband. There will be nothing in evidence, or of record, that will make your private sorrow a public scandal.

Mrs. S.—But the very idea of divorce is shocking to me. The simple contemplation of such an evil thing causes me to shudder.

Stapleton—Why, divorce is not an evil, my dear. It is simply a misfortune for those who must accept its refuge.

Masters—Exactly; that is well spoken, Willson. To many thousands divorce has come as an unmeasured blessing. Singularly enough, divorce, which is the the only means of escape from a condition filled with possibilities of evil, is itself regarded an evil. This is a popular error.

Mrs. S.—I wish I could bring myself to see it as you do.

Masters—Just a thought, now, that may help you to disabuse your mind of this bugaboo that imposes itself on your too sensitive conscience.

If divorce is an evil, then the affinities of nature are a lie and a delusion.

If divorce is an evil, then it is a good and holy thing for men and women who are magnetically repellant and temperamentally repugnant to persist in a state of wedlock—to bicker and contend and wrangle and scold and hate—until sweet death do them part.

If divorce is an evil, then crimination and recrimination are virtues, to be practiced and extolled.

If divorce is an evil, then acrimony and strife and discord and malignant hatred are born of heaven, and woe be to that impious and debased creature who would dare to supplant them with kindliness and concord and harmony and companionship and sympathetic love.

Why, my friends, divorce is the safety valve of society. It is the device of the law that relieves the bursting tension of overwrought temperaments, and makes it possible to bring peace and quiet out of rancor and rebellion.

Mrs. S.—I cannot combat your argument—and it takes hold on my reason, too—but, for me, divorce is like flying in the face of the Almighty—it's a complete turning away from long cherished Christian ideals.

Masters—Even so. You look through a colored glass, and frighten yourself unduly. Not more than two centruies ago witches were burned at the stake right here in Salem, and men were placed in the stocks and otherwise punished for kissing their wives on the Sabbath. Those savage and senseless acts were in accordance with Christian ideals of that past day, and they had been long cherished by good people, but, thank heaven, we have radically turned away from them.

Stapleton—You see, Lyman, Mrs. Stapleton has always believed in the scriptural theory that marriages are made in heaven, and that a

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